

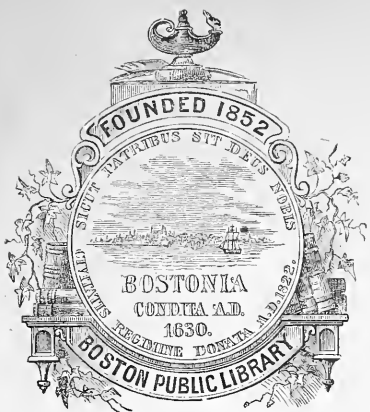


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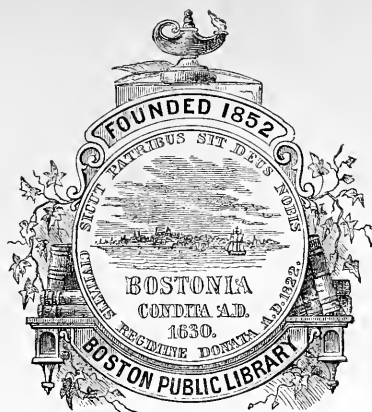
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PAMPHLETS.

Creeds

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## ART. V.—CHURCH CREEDS.

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The object of the present article is to discuss, as briefly as may be, the above-named subject, which, to bring the whole idea at once before the mind, may be stated in the following form : *Church Creeds ; or Confessions of Faith, their History and Value, and their proper Limits for Use in the Public Reception of Believers into the Church.*

This subject has troubled not a few of the pastors of our churches. Each separate church often has its separate creed ; and it seems to many as if order could be brought out of this confusion, only, either by the rejection of all local creeds, or by the adoption of a uniform standard in all our churches.

1. *What is a Creed ?*

"This word," says Webster, "seems to have been introduced by the use of the Latin *credo*, 'I believe,' at the beginning of the Apostles' Creed." When used in a religious sense, which will be its only use in this article, it may be defined as "a brief, compact summary of Christian Doctrine." It is a statement, both scientific and technical, as exhaustive as is consistent with its necessary brevity, of the belief of the person or persons who frame it. The customary form for the commencement of all creeds is, "We believe." To answer our definition, a creed should be a brief and scientific compend of all the Scripture data, which bear upon the essential points of Christian doctrine, of which the creed treats. There is no room for argument, for the creed is the summing up and the conclusion of all argument, the fruit of the most exhaustive study.

2. *The Growth of Creeds.*

The question may arise, at this point, how creeds came to exist. They are of human origin. No full creeds are found in the earliest times of the Church, but they have been intro-

duced through a long series of conflicts. What causes may be assigned for their growth? Mainly three; of which one is by far the most important:

(1.) The growth of the *scientific spirit* in the Church.

The seat of religion is the heart. All our efforts to convert and save men begin with the admission that men are depraved, and that their hearts must be renewed. But while our first and main endeavor should be to renovate the heart, the mind also is not forbidden its proper activity in the realm of religion. Our knowledge of the way of salvation is contained in the Bible. While its highest value to us is its adaptation to our wants as sinners, yet the Bible also introduces us into a world of mysterious truths, pertaining to God, his character, his existence, his attributes, his methods of saving a lost race. The believer makes the Bible his study. He find here that nourishment for the soul, which is so essential to its growth. But in doing this his mind is aroused; he encounters the mysteries just named; he finds himself struggling with the vast problems which even the Bible has not theoretically solved. Thus, by a necessary sequence, not only is the heart, in conversion, awakened to life, but the mind also is stimulated to activity upon a class of themes, which never before occupied it; the scientific spirit is aroused; and by slow degrees, the various problems of the Bible, being solved, so far as the human mind aided by inspiration is able to solve them, there naturally succeeds the desire to secure the truths thus unfolded, by reducing them to a written form. Easily, thus, and almost without intending it, a creed may be formed.

The growth of creeds, however, by this process, would necessarily be very tardy. The mind naturally sluggish, the individual not wont to overtax himself for the mere sake of science, but, above all, the fact that no necessity at first is felt of making a scientific and guarded statement of Scripture truth since no doctrine seems to be imperilled without such statement, all these causes would combine to make the growth

of creeds exceedingly slow, as the result merely of the development of what we have termed the scientific spirit. Doubtless, with no operating cause but this, creeds would have arisen during the long history of the church ; but it may well be doubted whether this cause alone would ever have produced creeds, so true in their orthodoxy, and so guarded in their statements, as are now the common heritage of the church.

(2.) A second and far more prolific source of the growth of creeds, is found in the coming up of *Heresies*.

While the church is free from error, and especially while, as was the case in the earliest period of the church, Christian experience is ardent, there appears no especial need of an exact creed-statement of the points of Christian belief. A vigorous piety, which is *living* Christian doctrine, which daily feasts the soul upon the vital facts of revelation, will experience the truth, and be satisfied with the simple, untechnical language of Scripture, and will, at the same time, be quite unable to make a scientific statement of the articles of belief. A vigorous piety is the best preservative from erroneous doctrine.

After the lapse of time, however, either from a decline in piety, or from some other cause, heresies begin to creep into the church. The adherents of right doctrine are at once aroused to defend the faith. The truth is assailed and must find champions. But "what is truth?" The heretic claims that he has the very truth of the Bible. The orthodox, he says, has misinterpreted the Word of God. Both parties claim the Bible as teaching their peculiar beliefs; and it is found that the time has come when the questions at issue can not be settled by a mere reference to the Scripture and an appeal to Scripture language; but after a most searching and profound exegesis of the whole teaching of Scripture, upon the doctrine in debate, a statement of the truth must be made, of so technical and scientific a nature, as to be able to be claimed by the orthodox alone. And hence it is true

that heresy has been the prolific mother of creeds. The noblest, most valuable, and most universally received creeds of the Evangelical Church, have been the direct offspring of discussions with heresies.

Reference need be made only to the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, in proof of this statement. No sooner has the church found herself confronted with an alarming heresy than the piety and learning of the church have been aroused to combat the error, with weapons drawn from the armory of divine truth, and such weapons that the enemy could not possibly employ them.

(3.) A third source of the growth of creeds, has been, *any form of False Doctrine*.

In the later ages of the church, particularly since the Reformation, there have been various forms of erroneous doctrine, which, while, perhaps, not meriting so strictly the title of heresy, have nevertheless been thought sufficiently detrimental to piety and orthodoxy, to deserve a condemnation in the form of creeds. Such have been the errors in Anthropology, held by some sects, respecting the doctrine of the fall and its consequences to the race: the errors of the Papal Church, such as the papal supremacy, the refusing of the cup to the laity, forbidding the clergy to marry, etc.; errors in Soteriology, ascribing a conjoint power to faith and works in the matter of our salvation, and such like. The multiplicity of creeds since the Reformation has been due more, perhaps, to this third source than to any other. The great battles with high-handed heresy had already been fought, but these lesser and more multiplied forms of error have given birth to various and somewhat numerous creeds.

If we pause now, a moment, to review the actual mode of the growth of creeds, we shall see that they have followed the order above indicated. The scientific spirit, working through three centuries, did not for these centuries give expression to a formal creed; if we except the Apostles' Creed, which is more scriptural than technical. Whence we learn

that the growth of creeds from this source alone would be very slow.

The first great heresy that arose within the church was the Arian, in the latter part of the third and beginning of the fourth century. The condemnation of that error, by the Council of Nice, furnished to the church in all coming time a creed-statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, embodying the substance of the scripture testimony on this all-important doctrine. Later errors respecting the proper divinity of the Holy Spirit, were corrected by the Council at Constantinople, A. D., 381; errors respecting the divine-human character of Christ, were met by the Council of Chalcedon, A. D., 451, and by the famous Athanasian Creed, beyond which symbol the church, on these points, has never gone.

Passing on then to the time of the Reformation, we find ourselves in the midst of the various lesser errors, creeping into the church through a period of several hundreds of years; and to meet these errors, we find the various Lutheran and Reformed symbols, the Augsburg Confession, striking at errors in the Anthropology, Soteriology, and other errors of the Church of Rome; the *Confessio Tetrapolitana*, differing from the Augsburg mainly in its more strictly scriptural doctrine of the Sacraments; the Basle and Helvetic Confessions and others, which need not be mentioned, each adapted to some peculiar phase in the life or history of the church.

And this process of creed-growth, we hold to be but natural. In its study of the Scripture, the devout mind must gather from all quarters the teachings of the Word; for purposes of devotion or instruction, the results of investigation will naturally fall into some simple form, chiefly in scriptural language, like the Apostles' Creed; and finally, after some great conflict, after overthrowing false doctrine and firmly establishing the true, the scientific mind and the Christian spirit naturally plant their banners, like the vanguard of an army, in an advanced and entrenched position. The fully-developed creed is the token of victory.

### 3. *The History of Creeds.*

We cannot dwell at length upon this topic, nor extend our review with any minuteness of detail over the centuries of church history, which have been most prolific of creeds; but we need only speak of a few of the earliest or most important, as indicative of the general course of their history.

The earliest of all the creeds in the church is the so-called "Apostles' Creed," or the *Symbolum Apostolicum*. The manner of the formation and growth of this creed has been a subject of much research. Rufinus, in the fourth century, maintained that it was actually a combination of elements, which the various apostles furnished; maintaining this from the etymology of the word *symbolum*: Greek, *σύμβολον*, from *συμβάλλειν*, to throw or put together, into one common stock, hence, *σύμβολον ὅτι ἕκαστος συνέβαλε*. This view is now generally if not universally rejected. Among the reasons for rejecting it are the facts, that it is found in different parts of the early church, with some considerable variations; that it is never referred to by any of the Fathers as being the direct work of the Apostles, and besides cannot be traced, in its present completed form, to an earlier period than the third century. It is, however, in all its parts strictly according to the apostolic teaching. Its earliest germs are doubtless to be found in the confession of Peter to Christ, (Mat. xvi, 16.) "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and in the trinitarian formula of Baptism, in the last chapter of Matthew. By slow degrees, and principally in scripture language, the facts of revelation were combined, till finally, in the third century, we find this creed, which, from its simplicity and its scriptural character, combined with its great breadth of signification, has been adopted by all parts of the Christian Church, in the language of Prof. Schaff, forming "the bond of unity for the Greek, the Roman and the Evangelical branches of the Church." This creed, the most ancient of any in the church, is, also, the briefest, and the foundation of all the prominent subsequent creeds.



The next creed, in point of time, was the famous Nicene Creed, framed at Nice, in the year 325, with the additions made at Constantinople, A. D., 381. The Apostles' Creed is essentially orthodox upon the doctrine of the Trinity ; but, from the simplicity and purely scriptural character of its language, it was liable to misinterpretation, and to be understood as not necessarily denying the Arian heresy. It was therefore reserved for the Councils of Nice and Constantinople to form a creed, which, while it embraced the very essence of the gospel, should, at the same time, be so strict in its use of terms, as forever to forbid its adoption by any one not orthodox upon the doctrine of the Trinity. The famous *ὁμολόγιον* may be regarded as the single pregnant word, which gave the Nicene symbol its greatest significance, and stamped it with the most enduring worth.

The theological mind has not, on the essential points, gone beyond the results reached in the Council of Nice, in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. After this council new questions arose respecting the nature of Christ. He was Divine : he was human. The question of these two natures, the facts and mode of their coëxistence, was the question agitated between the Councils of Nice and Chalcedon, A. D., 451, which latter council, finally, as far as it could be done by human wisdom and in human language, decided the question. Here it was affirmed, as Neander says, "that the one Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, should be recognised in two natures, so that all confusion, change and division of the two natures are excluded."

This brief statement respecting the Chalcedon decree will serve to introduce to our notice the third universal creed of the Christian Church, viz.: the "Athanasian," or as it is otherwise called, the "Symbolum Quicunque," so-called because its first word in the original or Latin form is "Quicunque." Although this symbol bears the name of Athanasius, yet there are the strongest reasons for believing that he was not its author ; its authorship and age it is now impossible

to determine. It probably received its name from the unison of its doctrines with those taught by Athanasius, just as the Apostles' Creed, though the work of the post-apostolic age, was called by their name. This creed embodies the substance of previous symbols. It embraces the trinitarianism of the Nicene Creed, in a more elaborate and careful form, and the christology of the Chalcedon decisions.

No creeds have been so universally accepted as these three. Others have supplemented them, as new necessities, and change of circumstances, have required; but none have been more discriminating and authoritative.

Of creeds, framed since the Reformation, there is not need to speak, further than to refer to that which has become the common symbol of all branches of the Presbyterian family, the "Westminster Confession," the history and contents of which are familiar to all readers of this article.

#### 4. *The Value of Creeds.*

Creeds are very decidedly objected to by some persons, and they are spoken of, by those who oppose them, in terms certainly not less denunciatory than those in which heretics have sometimes been anathematized by the orthodox. Dr. Channing speaks of his "aversion to creeds;" he calls them, the "means of fastening chains on men's minds;" he looks on "human creeds with feelings approaching contempt;" he commiserates those who "wear the chains of creeds." In his view, those mysteries, "which give a shock to the reason, and seem to contradict some acknowledged truth," "are the staples of creeds." Or, to sum up all in one sentence, he affirms: "Christianity, as set forth in creeds, is a propounder of dark sayings, of riddles, of knotty propositions, of apparent contradictions." These certainly are grave charges; and our work could not be considered thoroughly done, if we omitted to speak of the value of creeds.

We have already seen, that, in the first centuries of the Christian Church, the creeds were of a simple historical character; and the reason assigned for this fact is, that the

glowing piety of the early church made further articles unnecessary. What need to the early Christians of a formal creed-statement of the doctrine of the Trinity? The Christian heart received the doctrine; the believer worshipped Jesus, as "very God," and there was no need, either for himself or any one, that the doctrine should be drawn out in fuller statements. But while, in the best condition of the church, there is felt to be no necessity of a technical creed, it is also found that, in the worst condition of the church, a creed will not be tolerated. A warm Christian heart does not need a creed, a cold and likeless religionism will not have a creed. The creed is too exact in its statements to find favor with a heresiarch. His condemnation is pronounced by it in every line. The Apostles' Creed was not obnoxious to such men as Arius and Sabellius, who, though essentially heterodox in their belief, were yet able, on account of the simple language of that symbol, to interpret it according to their own erroneous views. While, therefore, in the earliest periods of the church, we behold a glowing piety perfectly able to dispense with a more definite creed, we now find those, who, while they may profess the minor moral virtues, are yet destitute of vital piety, and loudest in the cry, "away with creeds." The value of the creed, then is found in its ability to define error and bring it to light. There is a distinction between belief and unbelief. The church should embrace only those who hold to the faith. The church, which used only the Apostles' Creed, found that it was not sufficient to exclude error. No sooner was the Nicene symbol framed and adopted as the embodiment of the Scripture data relative to the profound and confessedly mysterious doctrine of the Trinity, than Arius and all his disciples were forever excluded from the pale of orthodoxy. And there is no other method of maintaining the purity of the church. Arius, with all his errors, claiming to receive both the Bible and the Apostles' Creed, was still within the church, until a more careful and guarded statement of the doctrine of the church

finally excluded him. The Nicene Council were brought face to face with the question, whether, for the sake of retaining all their numbers, whether for the sake of peace, they should retain error in the church, or frame a symbol, which in express terms should forever condemn it. To this day, the church prizes the Nicene Creed, because it has ever proved its value in the condemnation of heresy.

The value of creeds appears, again, in their tendency to unify the faith of the church. It is claimed, by some, that there is no greater unity among us than prevails, e. g., in the "Broad Church." It need not be denied that there is less of unity than were desirable; one reason for which is found, doubtless, in the fact that the church is not instructed in the creed as it should be. But it is obvious to every mind, that the very presence of the creed, standing as it does, at least as a theoretical barrier to false doctrine, can not fail to exert a unifying influence upon the church. Whether we will or not, it stands as a bond of union between believers. Those are more likely to be one in faith, who have in their homes, and often hear and read the words, "We believe in the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost," than are those who have no fixed formula of belief, and are left to believe one thing or another, as some spiritual guide, or as their own caprice, may dictate.

In still further proof of the value of creeds, we may refer to their influence in the past history of the church. The Papal church, is in its Soteriology, grossly, and in its Anthropology, largely deficient; but on the doctrine of the Trinity, very much through the influence of the Nicene Creed, it is orthodox to the present day. Is it too much to believe, that, if the results arrived at in the later centuries in the discussion upon those important themes, had been embodied in a permanent creed at an early day, and extensively diffused throughout the church, the Papal church might have been saved from some of the errors which now so nearly destroy its character as a Church of Christ?

It is this ability of the creed thus to stand as an epitome of Scripture teachings, so carefully to define the truth as to exclude error from whatever source, to serve as a standard to which all who hold the truth may rally, and as an anchor to which all in danger of drifting upon the shoals of unbelief may fasten, which gives it its great and lasting value.

We come now to consider that point, which, in the writer's mind, has most of practical interest in all this discussion upon creeds, viz :

5. *Their proper limits for their present use in our Churches.*

And here the discussion must lose its general character, as it is our intention to speak with exclusive reference to our own denomination. It will be our endeavor to show, if possible, what the law of Presbyterianism requires ; whence, if any where, departures from that law have arisen ; why, if at all, we should not return to the strict letter of that law ; and to conclude with some suggestions concerning the most desirable form of church-creeds, in the present day, if they are to be retained, and the only feasible manner, as appears to the writer, in which that form may be attained.

In most of our Presbyterian churches, (N. S.) persons of every age and class are received into the communion of the church, only on their assent to certain prescribed "Articles of Faith," and entering into covenant with the church. To every one familiar with our standards, it is evident that this is a practice not contemplated by the fathers of the church. The "Directory for Worship," (ch. ix.) prescribes the manner of the "Admission of Persons to Sealing Ordinances." The first and third sections convey the rules for receiving baptized children to these ordinances. The first section, after carefully appointing the manner of the child's Christian education, by which he is supposed to have been fitted, by the grace of God, for all the privileges of full communion, concludes : "when they (baptized children) come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady, and to have a sufficient knowledge to discern the

Lord's body, they ought to be informed, it is their duty and their privilege to come to the Lord's Supper." And to guard against all mistake or error, and to keep the church free from unworthy members, in full communion, the third section provides, that before they are "admitted to sealing ordinances," they "shall be examined as to their knowledge and piety." If this examination prove satisfactory to the Session, there remains for them but the plain and simple duty to "inform" these persons, that they have a new "duty" and a new "privilege," viz.: to sit down at the Table of the Lord. They are recognized as already in the church. "A particular church," says the Form of Government, (ch. ii, § 4,) "consists of a number of professing Christians with their offspring." "All baptized persons, (Discipline, ch. i, § 6,) are members of the church." In accordance with these quotations, it is affirmed to be unpresbyterian, to require any baptized child to assent to Articles of Faith. The mode of his admission to the full communion of the church is plainly prescribed, and no such articles are sanctioned.

In respect to person previously unbaptized, the rule is slightly different. The fourth section, in ch. ix, of the "Directory," prescribes that they shall undergo a similar examination, "with respect to their knowledge and piety," and afterwards they shall "make a public profession of their faith in the presence of the congregation." The most that can be said in respect to this language is, that it might allow Articles of Faith to be used, for the unbaptized alone, if the session so prescribe. In full accordance with this view, the General Assembly of 1865, (Minutes, 1865, page 23,) holds this language: "It is well, however, to remember, that the Confession of Faith and Covenants in use among local churches \* \* \* are \* \* \* not essential to the organization of a church, or the establishment of membership therein, since they are not the authoritative standard of faith or practice in the Presbyterian Church." In the same spirit, the General Assembly of 1831, in a paper on the organization of new congregations

provides for the reception of those who bring letters from other churches, and then for the admission "to a profession of faith of such persons as may offer themselves;" but no mention is made of their assenting to Articles of Faith, (New Digest, page 36). The only recognition of the admissibility of such articles, which has come under the writer's notice, in the standards of our church, is in the action of the Assembly of 1837, in a "Testimony against certain Disorders and Irregularities," one of which is declared to be, "the formation of a great multitude and variety of creeds," after describing which, as "needless" and often harmful, the Assembly concludes: "it being understood, that we do not object to the use of a brief abstract of the doctrines of our Confession of Faith, in the public reception of private members to the church," (Digest, page 312,) which seems much like acting on the principle, "what can't be cured, must be endured." The custom of employing these confessions was then widely prevalent, and the Assembly, perhaps, wisely judged, that greater evils would arise from an effort at their violent expulsion than from allowing them to remain.

These authorities seem to furnish conclusive evidence, that the law of Presbyterianism not only does not require, but does not even contemplate, the use of confessions of faith by the individual church. The very silence of the standards with reference to their use, coupled with the express provision for the officers of the church to adopt the full confession, plainly favors this view.

A word, perhaps, should be said here respecting the reason why a confession of faith was not deemed essential for the private members of the church. In the first place, very careful provision was made for the training of children, whereby it was secured that they should grow up sound in the faith. And in the second place, all the officers of the church, the Pastor, Elders and Deacons, who are the appointed spiritual guides of the flock, were and are required to signify their adhesion to our elaborate Confession of Faith. Providing

thus for the education of the children, and for the soundness in doctrine of the church teachers, it was believed the orthodoxy of the church was safe.

A question more difficult of solution succeeds. *Whence came* this so wide spread innovation? What influence so potent has arisen, to thrust upon the church a custom which is foreign to its very constitution? Investigations upon this subject, which has been carried on rather over the track of tradition than of history, have led to the following conclusions:

There was formerly a very close relation between Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. Very many of our (N. S.) Presbyterian Churches were founded by congregationalists from the Eastern States. Each Congregational Church, being independent, found it necessary, in self-defence, to frame its own Articles of Faith, as they were without a common standard, received like our confession.

Nothing was more natural, therefore, than for Congregational clergymen, emigrating to Central and Western New York and other parts, when they founded churches of the Presbyterian order, to introduce into these churches confessions of faith similar to those they had used in New England. The wide-spread introduction, as well as the very great diversity of creeds is, in part, at least, accounted for in this way.

From a variety of sources, also, the information has been received, that Dr. Griffin, during his pastorate in Newark, N. J., introduced the innovation of creeds into the churches in that region. A New Englander by birth and education, and a man of decided convictions, it is not strange that with his force of character, and his great influence, and withal his undoubted conviction of the utility of creeds, he should have succeeded in introducing a practice which has, at length, become well nigh universal in our branch of the church.

In evidence of the fact that the use of creeds is an innovation, it may be added, that in the O. S. Church, which has



doubtless preserved a more rigid Presbyterianism than ourselves, the use of such articles is comparatively unknown, "south of the zone affected by the Westward influence of Congregationalism, emanating from New England." They have "no public solemnities connected with the admission of baptized persons to the communion," but simply the prescribed examination and admission by the Session. And for the "profession of faith," which is required of an unbaptized adult, they employ in some of their churches, at least, only the Apostles' Creed.

In the further prosecution of our subject, we now arrive at a question of no little practical interest: *shall we return to the strict letter of Presbyterian Law?* Would it be wise to discard creeds altogether in the reception of members to our churches, and conform strictly to the mode of admission prescribed in the Book? To these questions, those who return an answer in the negative, adduce considerations like the following:

(1.) The change would create excitement and might result in harm. It may be said, in favor of the confessions employed in our churches, that their use is not hurtful; if they remain, the church will not be injured. Quietness, therefore, would demand that they remain.

(2.) The act of admission to the communion should be made a solemn act. It is better that even the baptized children, who, according to the strict letter of our law, are already members of the church, should do some act of their own which shall forever invest their admission to sealing ordinances with a character of solemnity, which shall make them feel that as they come up to "years of discretion," they, by their own public declaration, forever renounce the world, and become known as active members of the visible church. The effect of the solemn, public, personal dedication of one's self to the service of the Lord, as well on the part of the baptized children of the church, as of those previously unbaptized, can not fail to have a beneficial effect upon the person performing the act.

(3.) There remains a yet more important reason, for the retaining of the present usage, even in respect to children "born within the pale of the visible church." The same chapter of the "Directory," which prescribes the manner of their admission to sealing ordinances, prescribes also the manner of their preparation for this important step, in these words: they "are to be taught to read and repeat the Catechism, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. They are to be taught to pray, to abhor sin, to fear God, and to obey the Lord Jesus Christ." In how many families and Sabbath Schools, in the present day, is the Catechism wholly ignored! How many children never read, or even hear of, much less learn, the Apostles' Creed? How few, comparatively, are taught with that patience, constancy and faith which should characterize family instruction, "to abhor sin, to fear God and to obey the Lord Jesus Christ." There is a wide-spread departure from old-time and prescribed modes of Christian education, and it may well be doubted, whether the framers of the Standards, would have insisted on their modes of admission to sealing ordinances, when their modes of instruction were so largely disregarded.

It can not be denied that each of these reasons, but particularly the last, has weight. Instruction in the Catechism and the Apostles' Creed *insured* soundness in the faith. These neglected, it may have become necessary for the church, as a guard against erroneous doctrine, to establish a new standard of admission to the ordinances of the church. The one question for the church to decide is, whether she will suffer the evil of the imperfect Christian education of her children to continue, and along with that, keep creeds as a defence; or whether she will restore the good, old catechetical and primitive methods of education, and thus prepare the way to have done with creeds altogether. This latter plan, which, to the writer's mind, seems the one by far most desirable, can yet be accomplished only by time. Meanwhile, during the continued use of creeds, what shall be

their *form*; and how shall the most desirable form be attained?

One circumstance deserves attention at the outset. The custom of the church respecting the admission of children to sealing ordinances, is very different from what it was twenty-five years ago. The past few years have witnessed many and powerful revivals in our Sabbath Schools, and the churches have come to receive to their communion children of very tender age. All the children are obliged to assent to the creed, equally with those of more advanced years. But no child can understand one-fourth part of the language of the Articles of Faith usually employed in our churches.

Also, the language of these creeds is not such as is adapted to the common class of mind. They are drawn up, for the most part, if not wholly, by clergymen who have studied the great doctrines of the gospel, not in the simple language of the Scripture only, but in the technical language which has been employed by theologians, and which they have been compelled to employ, as we have seen, by the heresies which have arisen within the church. The creeds, therefore, which are now employed are, to a great extent, technical, scientific, abstract, elaborate, far, very far, beyond the comprehension of children and youth, if not, also, of adults. These words will not be understood as a plea for a creed level to every comprehension: no creed can be such, for every one must embrace somewhat of the "mystery of godliness;" but, what is pleaded for is a creed which shall be more simple, more brief and more purely scriptural in its language. It were better for us to return, in some degree, to the custom of the primitive church. According to that, the admission of adults to the church was accomplished by the assent of the candidate to certain facts of religion. This confession was brief, simple, scriptural, combining the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Deity of Christ, and his mediatorial Person and Work. At an early day, the Apostles' Creed became the customary

formula for the instruction of catechumens, and for their confession at baptism and union with the church.

At the same time, these creeds should be sufficiently strict, so as not to admit error. Not one word is here spoken in favor of any latitudinarianism. No one could abhor, more than the writer, a symbol which could be used as well by the "Broad Church" as by the orthodox. But in respect to this idea, it may be said that the lines between truth and error are now more distinctly drawn than in the days of the Nicene controversy. No Arian would now seek to thrust himself within an Orthodox communion; he finds his natural, his congenial home, within the precincts of a church "broad" enough to embrace every form of error the world has ever known, so only it be coupled with a correct outward life. There is not, therefore, the same necessity upon us, especially the individual churches, for retaining a technical symbol, which the Council of Nice had for forming one. If our creeds could be simplified, expurgated of theological terms, abbreviated, scripturalized, they would, without doubt, retain all their present excellencies, while they would be relieved of many defects.

On the supposition, then, that creeds are, for a time at least, to remain in our churches, on whom shall the labor devolve of preparing one suitable for general use? At the present time, individual persons and individual churches, have undertaken the labor for themselves, and endless confusion has been the result. Some Presbyteries have assumed to provide their churches with a uniform creed, but the confusion is scarcely diminished. To extricate the church from this confusion, but two courses are possible.

We must either abolish creeds altogether, or if they are to remain, *the General Assembly should provide the churches with a uniform creed for the reception of all members to the church.*

An effort was made in this direction a few years ago, which for some reason failed. There is no reason why it should

fail. Let the Assembly appoint a Committee of the representative men of the church, of some diversity of age and temperament, let a symbol be prepared, discussed, even for two or three years, in successive assemblies if necessary, let it be thus revised, improved, perfected and finally adopted by the Assembly. Thence let it be sent down to the Presbyteries, with the strong indorsement of the highest judicatory of our church, and with the earnest recommendation that it be adopted by every presbytery as the uniform standard for all its churches. Would not the result be one we might all hail with joy?

It is evident too, that the church, through its General Assembly, has this power. In the "Form of Government," (ch. i, § 2,) it is affirmed, that "every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government, which Christ hath appointed." Let General Assembly prescribe the qualifications requisite for all the members of our churches, by sending forth a uniform standard of belief, and it will have done a good work for the church. Many churches and many of our older pastors feel the need, at the present time, of creeds, very different from those they now employ, and yet they shrink from adding a single new symbol to those, so numberless, already in existence.

This part of the discussion may therefore properly terminate, with the expression of a conviction, that the creeds, on which believers are admitted to the communion of the church, should be more simple, more brief, more scriptural in their terminology; and that the General Assembly of our Church should be petitioned to provide the churches with a uniform and abbreviated symbol.

The writer cannot lay aside his pen, without expressing the wish, that the thoughts herein embodied may awaken

other minds in the same direction, may stimulate abler pens to the discussion of the theme, and may result in combining the wisdom of the Church in the production of a creed, in the adoption of which all portions of the Church may heartily unite.

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#### ART. VI.—PRESBYTERIAN REUNION.

Thirty years ago the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was divided. The rupture was preceded by violent ecclesiastical agitations, and bitter doctrinal controversies. A new generation has since grown up, and a new and calmer spirit pervades our churches. By a sure instinct they have been coming nearer together. The question about voluntary societies has become insignificant; the doctrinal differences are fading away; the Plan of Union is well nigh obsolete; slavery is abolished throughout the land, by a higher than ecclesiastical authority; the Southern Presbyterian churches of both Schools are together, and by themselves, and likely to remain so for some time. The whole of the new generation of ministers, and the great body of the laity, in both branches of the church, see no sufficient reason for continuing a division, which weakens and embarrasses us at many points, which is a reproach to our Christianity, and an incubus upon our proper Christian work. We have the same standards of doctrine and polity; we are distinguished by identical family characteristics from the other denominations around us; we are living and working for the same ends, in the same towns and villages across the broad central belt of our common country; we are planting our missionary and feeble churches side by side in our new states and territories, and so wasting our strength. Why, then, should we stay longer asunder?

Wise and good men have been asking this question for the



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